



## *Current Reflections*

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### **Hydro Tops the Poll, Again**

Once again, public opinion polling attitudes towards the Northwest's hydro system, energy, and salmon shows a strong understanding and support for hydro power as the region's premier source of clean, green renewable energy. A March 2010 poll of registered voters in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho, conducted by Davis, Hibbitts & Midghall, told us this and much more.

According to pollster Tim Hibbitts, "Northwest voters continue to see hydro, wind and solar as part of a renewable team to provide energy to the Northwest, and hydro continues to be seen as the most practical source of energy for the Northwest". Hydro power also is viewed as clean, renewable, and climate friendly, with 70 percent of respondents recognizing it does not contribute to global warming.



We know people in the Northwest care deeply about salmon – and so do we. Currently, about 1,000 megawatts of clean hydropower is devoted to helping young fish migrate downstream – almost enough energy to fuel a city the size of Seattle. So we also asked people whether they would be willing to have hydropower reduced even more to help salmon runs in the Northwest. They aren't. By a margin of 54 percent to 35 percent, respondents said they would not be willing to have hydro diminished further if the tradeoff is natural gas or coal.



We also explained in our poll that Northwest utilities will be facing many challenges, all of which will increase the cost of electricity for customers. These included acquiring new sources of renewable energy, like wind and solar, research into new technologies, energy efficiency programs, as well as investments in power lines, plants and substations, and fish and wildlife programs.

When asked what should be utilities' highest priority for investment given these choices, 60 percent said it should be new renewable generating resources and technologies; only 3 percent opted for more spending on fish and wildlife protection.

And not surprising in the current shaky economy, voters are concerned about rising power costs and reliability of the system. Nearly 70 percent of respondents say they would be concerned – 34 percent would be *very* concerned – if their electricity rates increased 5 percent every couple of years solely to improve salmon runs. Over half were worried about even a 2.5 percent increase in their power bills. And, 64 percent said a reliable electric system is a higher priority than salmon protection efforts.

“Voters continue to care about salmon as they always have, but in these tough economic times, they are also very sensitive to increased energy costs,” Hibbitts noted.

In an opinion that has remained unchanged since our polling began in 2005, a large majority of the respondents – 67 percent – continues to oppose removing the Lower Snake River dams. Among the states, Idaho voters are the most adamantly opposed. A striking 79 percent of respondents in Idaho oppose dam removal compared to 66 percent and 65 percent, respectively, in Washington and Oregon.

While the anti-dam activists lose no time in claiming every analysis and study as a victory, mounting their removal spin no matter what the reality, they clearly are out of touch with public sentiment.

Voters in the Northwest value salmon for its economic, recreational and cultural significance; but they also value low cost, reliable, clean and renewable hydro power. They realize the Lower Snake River dams are vital to power production and the region’s economic health. And, many are aware that the hydropower system is a vital link to bringing even more renewables on line in the Northwest. With its unique ability to match the ups and downs in variable generators, like wind and solar, the hydro system is key in the Northwest to keeping the power flowing reliably.

RiverPartners is about promoting policies to protect and restore healthy runs of salmon and the many benefits provided by the Northwest’s Columbia and Snake rivers and hydro system. It is clear the public agrees with us.



*Terry Flores is Executive Director of Northwest River Partners, an alliance of farmers, utilities, ports and businesses that promote the economic and environmental benefits of the Columbia and Snake Rivers and salmon recovery policies based on sound science.*

*For more information, please visit [www.nwriverpartners.org](http://www.nwriverpartners.org).*